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INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 6005
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0169
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 2887
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1238
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1413
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/18/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: HELEN BERHANE IN HOSPITAL AFTER BEING BEATEN

Classified By: AMB. Scott H. DeLisi for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Post has confirmed reports that Helen Berhane, noted Eritrean Evangelical Christian gospel singer, is receiving medical treatment at Halibet Hospital in Asmara. The hospital admitted Ms. Berhane after she was severely beaten while detained in the Mai Serwa prison. At this time her condition is stable. Presently, she is in a wheelchair with a leg injury so severe she is unable to walk. Berhane confirmed to her family and the doctors at the hospital that she had been beaten in prison. Post does not know if Berhane experienced other forms of torture.

¶2. (C) Berhane was hospitalized on or about October 7. Upon being notified secretly of Berhane,s hospitalization by a member of the hospital staff, her family came to visit her. For several days other friends and fellow church members also saw her in the hospital, however, the hospital administrators subsequently limited visitation to just her parents, daughter and grandmother. Her family continues to visit her and report that despite severe beatings and repeated attempts to force her renounce her faith, she has refused. Her family hopes that upon completion of her medical treatment she will be freed from detention.

¶3. (C) Helen Berhane was arrested in May 2004 shortly after she released an album of Christian music. She is a member of the Rema Church, one of the unregistered churches in Eritrea. The GSE has detained her at Mai Serwa, a prison just outside of Asmara, and her family has not seen her in nearly two years.

¶4. (C) Comment: Post will continue to follow the situation closely. Through friends of the family, post has communicated our concern for Ms. Berhane,s welfare and our continued criticism of the GSE,s restrictions on religious freedom. The family has in response expressed its appreciation for our concern. We are actively seeking a meeting with Ms. Berhane,s parents and will explore with them the options for Embassy staff to visit Ms. Berhane. Although we would welcome the chance to interview her and

publicly highlight our support for her and others detained on religious grounds we recognize that it is highly unlikely the GSE will allow us to visit her. Nor, given the GSE,s on-going persecution of members of the unregistered religious

groups, do we share her family,s hope that she will be released upon her recovery. Nonetheless, we are sensitive to family concerns and will coordinate carefully with the family on any efforts to visit Ms. Berhane. The worry is that public engagement by the USG will cause the GSE to respond even more harshly towards Ms. Berhane and given the GSE,s track record this concern has some merit. End Comment.
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